



USDA awards \$1.4 million to Wisconsin specialty crops

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MADISON – Agricultural research and study are key to developing new food products and protecting the ones we already have. To that end, the United States Department of Agriculture last week awarded the state of Wisconsin \$1.4 million to fund 24 projects through the Specialty Crop Block Grant program.

“Specialty crops add to the diversity that is so important to Wisconsin agriculture and provide opportunities for many farm families and agribusinesses to expand into new markets and increase their profitability,” said Dan Smith, administrator of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP’s) Division of Agricultural Development. “This money will fund many worthy products including research to protect Wisconsin’s pollinators, manage crop pests and grow markets for Wisconsin foods.”

Specialty crops include fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. In Wisconsin, those products include cranberries; ginseng; apples; and processing vegetables such as potatoes, carrots or onions, to name a few.

Projects were selected through a competitive review process. Recipients will provide at least 25 percent of the total grant award as a matching contribution.

This year’s recipients include:

- UW-River Falls for development of a sustainable beekeeping system.
- The Wisconsin Ginseng Board to develop management strategies to reduce pests and help Wisconsin ginseng growers to grow into new markets by reducing or eliminating pesticide residues that pose trade barriers.
- DATCP to develop a plan to market Wisconsin cranberries in India and to educate Hmong ginseng and fresh-market vegetable growers about risk-management tools.
- UW-Stevens Point to research the use of vermicomposting or compost tea for ginseng fertilization.
- The University of Wisconsin Board of Regents to study disease impact and management as well as pest management in cranberry crops, conduct field trials to improve hops production and study on-farm sustainability methods for small, commercial vegetable growers in order to help them meet the growing demand for their products.
- Midwest Food Processors Association to study the use of neonicotinoids as seed treatment for processing vegetables and how it might impact native or domestic pollinators.
- CESA to develop a series of culinary skills training videos directed toward increasing the use of Wisconsin-grown specialty crops in schools lunch programs.
- Wisconsin Local Food Network to increase awareness and use of the Farm to Hospital program.

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